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# Introduction to Environmental Law

Fall 2007

Volume 1

Prof. Donald N. Dewees

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## Fall, 2007

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# Physical Aspects of Pollution

## Two types of pollutants

## TR-Classifications

Degrading - harmful effect declines over time

BOD, bread in fish tank; particulates settle out; O<sub>2</sub> removed.

Persistent (conservative) - harmful effect persists for years, centuries.

Hg, Pb, PCB, DDT

We tend to worry more about conservative pollutants than degrading because the harm from today's discharge occurs for decades into the future as well as today. Ongoing harm.

## Two models of the environment

Stable - when disturbed, returns to original state if end disturbance.

Marble in bowl. Bread in fish tank. Selective logging of temperate forest (?)

Unstable - when disturbed, cannot prevent from moving to new state.

Marble on basketball. Clearcut rainforest - erosion, desert. Global warming – Gulf Stream

If you believe an ecosystem is unstable, you will worry more about today's pollution than if you think it is stable. This accounts for much of the variation in concerns about the environment.

## Two types of harm

Reversible - if the pollution stops, the environment can be restored.

Bread in lake. Air pollution damage to forest.

Irreversible - if the pollution stops, the damage remains long time.

Dam on scenic gorge. Development of wetlands. Heavy metal pollution of soil. Genetic damage to species

Irreversible harm causes losses far into the future, so we should worry much more about it than about reversible harm. Take fewer risks with irreversible.

Irreversible damage is often associated with a persistent pollutant or with an unstable environment, or major construction projects.

## Two models of air and water movement

Mixed - uniform pollution concentration, discharge from any source same effect.

Air in Los Angeles basin, water in small lake.

Unmixed - varying pollution concentration, discharge from one source affects some receptors more than others.

Flowing stream; air on windy day; BOD in large lakes.

Choice of policies is significantly affected by whether the environment is mixed or unmixed. Over what area does the mixing occur? Local, region, province, earth?

## Shape of damage function

Linear through origin – harm is proportional to concentration

More is worse, less is better, no concentration is special.

Threshold – no harm up to threshold, serious harm thereafter

If the harm is serious, large benefits from keeping concentration < threshold.

